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## WORLD-POLITICS.

PARIS: WASHINGTON.

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PARIS, *August, 1907.*

FOR three blissful months, there will be no sitting of the Chamber, few Cabinet meetings, no political case in the courts, nothing loud, nothing feverish in a country that is nearly always under high pressure. The only thing to remind us that we live in a republican land, whose citizens have a right to interfere in public affairs, will be a few after-dinner speeches, and they will be so dignified, so moderate, so much in the tone of the Peace Conference that they will seem unreal and leave us at liberty to dream that ours is a country in which it is always afternoon. Let us, then, let politics alone, as they let us, and take a quiet survey of the literary commonwealth.

Is it a mistake to imagine that we are nearly always less drawn to the classics of a modern literature than to the exponents of its latest and too often tawdry development? Certainly, there is more talk in Paris about Oscar Wilde than about Shakespeare,—though “Julius Cæsar” narrowly missed being the play of the year,—and somehow I am under an impression that so much attention was accorded in English-speaking countries to the realism of Zola and the decadentism of Verlaine and Mallarmé that for a time, in England and America, French Literature was identified with their names. It is, I am afraid, a common error of all who wish to delve under the surface to mistake at first singularity for rarity, and the admiration of a clique for the promise of fame. Others than foreigners are taken in by appearances. It takes an exceptionally good head or long experience to detect charlatanism, crudeness or obviousness under a pompous or abstruse theory of art. How was one to suspect, until his note-books were published, that such a prolific and, in

some respects, powerful writer as Zola had worked out his theory of the naturalistic novel from the cheapest text-books? Could any one who came near such a fascinating talker as Mallarmé imagine that his symbolism was moonshine, and that less than ten years after his death his sealed book would no longer be a source of wonderment, but one of endless merriment? A novelist who only aims at telling stories and a poet who is content with writing verse are easily classed: but when they talk Darwinian or Wagnerian profundities over their songs or puppets, one is only too apt to credit them with an overawing philosophy.

The fact is that, excepting some three or four hundred lines of Verlaine's, which forcibly recall about as many of Villon's, and which will live by very much the same charm, the rest of the decadent production was admired exclusively by impostors who called themselves initiated, and has totally and forever disappeared from our literature.

As to Zola, even in his lifetime, he had been given up, with unnecessary publicity, by the brothers Margueritte and many more of his disciples, who felt that there was enough in them to make their writings literature and not literary documents.

The Parnassian School has also become practically a thing of the past. Who has not read with pleasure some highly wrought jewel—like a Sonnet of Heredia's,—or admired the cunning with which Le Comte de Lisle succeeded in making words act on the mind like sculpture? But who has not also promptly felt a surfeit of those effects, when, page after page, he met with the same glittering or embossed epithets, and never a tone of human tenderness? And who ever tried his hand at an imitation of those polished pieces but did not find at once that their apparent finish was easier than Musset's carelessness?

The transformation in French poetry during the past fifteen years is certainly in the right direction. When you ask a coming man what school he belongs to, he may tell you that, until he was twenty, he theorized with M. Ernest Lajeunesse or M. St.-Georges Bouhéliér; but the smile on his lips leaves you no doubt that these youthful predilections appear to him at present like the blind efforts of a chrysalis to escape from its cocoon. The fact is he belongs to no school, and M. St.-Georges Bouhéliér himself, the moment he ceased to talk about the works he was to produce, and did produce some work, lost not only his disciples

and schools, but his very principles, and he is at present humbly and honestly trying to rise from the theatres on the "Boulevard Extérieur" to those which he used to revile when he was young and *nil* and famous. There is no chance to-day for a literary theory founded on a more abstruse principle than that man takes most interest in man.

I was reading, the other day, in the "*Mercure de France*"—which is still one of the best French literary magazines and the most open to all sorts of sincere efforts—an article by Tancred de Vizan, in which were set forth the ideals of what is called "the new symbolism." What is the good of giving such a name to such a simple thing? The new symbolist's creed consists in avoiding the systematic appearance of both Parnassians and Decadents in talking no jargon, and seeking to express all the soul's attitudes, including specially the most evanescent.

One may regret that the stress should be laid on the expression of rare and elusive mental states, as if Othello were coarse compared with Hamlet. The pleasure of catching glimpses of "soul landscapes" by infinitely quick flashes is not quite wholesome yet, and the result is that a great deal of these young men's poetry looks like Loti done into verse. Still, perfect sincerity and the broadest outlook are what they recommend, and this ideal entails industry, honesty and intelligence, and must some day result in the production of really human works. What draws the public to the poems of, for instance, the Countess of Noailles? Certainly the boldness of her defiant paganism, but, above all, a few sparks of sincere emotion springing, in a few passages, from under her awkward or pretentious expression. The same ought to be said of Henri de Régnier, and of his numerous disciples. The public taste is rapidly ceasing to be in favor of all over-refinement, of the elaborately obscene, the quaintly graceful reminding one of a minuet, the would-be profound, and is reverting unconsciously to the manly realism of the classics and the Greeks.

I have no doubt that one most powerful poet, a man with a wonderful range of emotion and a unique culture, appreciated so far by only the few best judges, Auguste Angellier, will soon force his plain and strong ideal on the rising generation.

This simplification is especially remarkable in the prose of the last twenty years. It is in vain that the average French writer

aims or pretends to aim at depth, vast erudition or even extensive experience. His native qualities are the common sense and lucidity of expression which are the universally acknowledged groundwork of the best French literature. When he tries to put on German philosophy or Anglo-Saxon imagery, he soon looks obscure, turgid and affected.

It is this revenge of the classic spirit on romantic affectation, that we are witnessing. Renan, whose object was always to impress his reader with an idea that he only thought of the matter of his books, and never of their form, felt that his best chance of being original was to return to a quiet, direct style of writing, and to seek the picturesque effect which the modern man requires everywhere by the skilful use of a very few adjectives. His unparalleled success was a lesson eagerly learned by such men as Jules Lemaitre and Anatole France, the latter, especially, who has made for himself a language of Greek simplicity, but composed, like the metal of Corinth, of the best in our classical periods, and of admirable flexibility.

This pupil of many masters has won numberless disciples, and the lovers of French literature ought to thank him for the almost universal return to honesty and charity which gives at present an antediluvian appearance to what is left of decadent sophistication. It is a fact that more than one writer who had squandered his talents in trying to give them the appearance of genius has had the sense to forswear grandiloquence and to adopt the honest expression under which pretentiousness cannot be hidden, but strength appears more manly. There is no more notable instance than Maurice Barrès: it will always be pointed out as a most unfortunate mistake that a man who might have been the Châteaubriand of his age should have waited until he was famous to condescend to be intelligible.

There seems to be every reason to suppose that French literature is on the way to complete recovery from the disease of affectation, systems and formulas, or in one word, which is convenient if properly understood, of romanticism. Sincerity, submission to nature, the large realism of the classics, in short, have a charm of their own—far superior to mere literature,—too great to be easily forgotten. Men will think of living before writing, and also while writing; they will become more and more aware of the unnaturalness of being “literary animals”; they will try to be,

above all, men in the full sense of the word, making literature subserve higher interest than itself.

But is it possible to do more than anticipate this revival? Are there any signs that it is already beginning? In short, is it possible to name the great men of to-morrow? This question must unfortunately be answered in the negative. Victor Hugo, Lamartine, Musset, Michelet and Quinet had risen above the horizon before they were thirty years of age, and had given proofs of the versatility and facility which are among the characteristics of genius. Many of their elders named the direction they were following, but nobody said they were not taking giant's strides. There is no undoubted talent of this order in the rising literary generation. Every now and then one is arrested by a work of considerable value from an unknown pen, but nearly always the youthful talent proves to be less promise of further and higher achievements than precocious cleverness and skilful management. The writer ages without seeming to become older; I mean riper and richer. This was the case with M. Marcel Prévost, with M. Rod, with the poet Depont, with many others. It was especially the case with Léon Daudet, the son of the famous novelist, who startled the world with three or four works of powerful satire before he was thirty years old, and at nearly forty still looks physically and mentally the buoyant, promising lad who was to take his father's place. All these men reach the second rank on their first flight, but never rise higher. Their initial success is possibly the reason of their final failure: untimely popularity dazzles them, society pets them, and they promptly lose the notion of effort in the dim consciousness that cleverness is a good substitute for intrinsic merit.

Meanwhile, as I was saying, most—or I should say, nearly all—of the works worth the attention of a few months bear names which one is frightened to think will soon be those of veterans: Bourget, Loti, Barrès, France, Rod, Prévost. And year after year those works undergo an influence conspicuous, above all, on the stage, and more moral than literary. The success of Ibsen's plays tends to convert novelist as well as playwright into a director of conscience and a preacher or a politician with an infallible nostrum. Even such men as M. Lavedan and M. Donnay, who used to think of nothing except amusement, have gradually been compelled to follow M. Brieux and M.

Hervieu, and go into psychological cases with most edifying gravity and—it should be added—with as much talent as when their ideal was no higher than the “*Vie Parisienne*.”

So M. Bourget is anti-Dreyfusist and writes on behalf of the royalist claims; M. France is Dreyfusist and lends the charm of his style to the Socialist dreams; M. Bazin is provincial and Catholic; M. Barrès sticks to his poetical nationalism, while M. Rod and M. Prévost take hold of every question of interest and dramatize it with undoubted skill.

Everything considered, it is not impossible that Loti, France—the France of the sceptical early studies,—and, above all others, Rostand, the most genuine artist of them all, should appear, in the judgment of posterity, as the only representatives of this age, which, however, is full of promise; and in any event we ought to hail with gratitude a movement substituting the honesty, wit and large human kindness of a J. Lemaître for the abracadabra of a Mallarmé.

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WASHINGTON, August, 1907.

IN the absence of the President and most of the heads of Departments, August is apt to be a dull month at the Federal capital; but this year there is no dearth of interesting topics for discussion. For instance, the conspicuous and useful part played by the American delegation at The Hague is viewed with lively satisfaction. We have formerly pointed out the wisdom of selecting such experienced diplomatists as ex-Ambassador Choate and ex-Ambassador Porter for a difficult and delicate task. It will be no fault of theirs if the second Peace Conference—which really was called by our Government, though, out of deference to the Tsar, the convoker of its predecessor, he was requested to issue the invitations in his name—shall prove entirely abortive. It has already been shown conclusively that the primary object for which both assemblages were supposed to meet—that, namely, of lessening the burdens imposed upon European taxpayers by enormous military and naval armaments—has even less chance of being attained in 1907 than it had in 1899. That the question is far from being ripe is evident from the fact that no definite proposal to the end in view has even been propounded. Sir Edward Fry of the British delegation, who had the matter in charge, and who came with high hopes to The Hague, has

become convinced of the impossibility of effecting any real progress towards retrenchment, and, in his discouragement, has fallen back on a resolution carefully restricted to the expression of a wish that the Conference would not openly abjure the desire for an adjustment of outlay on preparations for warfare to the respective resources and requirements of the nations concerned, but continue to proclaim it at least an abstract ideal, to be compassed perhaps hereafter under more propitious circumstances. As none of the Powers was committed to anything by such an empty declaration, it was approved with edifying unanimity, and Sir Edward Fry was left to explain to outside philanthropists the disconcerting miscarriage of his exemplary design. While, moreover, the spokesmen of the British Government will have no positive achievement to their credit, they will have to account to the humanitarian section of their countrymen for their too successful opposition to Mr. Choate's proposal to mitigate the losses and sufferings from war, by providing that hereafter the private property of belligerents, no less than of neutrals, should, unless contraband, be exempt from seizure at sea. The British alternative, to wit, the abolition of contraband, was naturally inadmissible, because such an innovation would enable a neutral to carry arms and ammunition, as well as coal and food supplies, to any belligerent port which did not happen to be blockaded. As for Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Russia and Japan, each of these great Powers refrained from asking for any important change in the existing law of nations. Amid such apathy, the second Peace Conference would doubtless have adjourned some time ago, but for the grim determination of ex-Ambassadors Choate and Porter to pluck at least some measure of success out of the jaws of what, apparently, was destined to prove derisory defeat. General Porter, for his part, has persisted in trying to secure the unanimous sanction required for the insertion in international law of the Drago Doctrine in a modified form, a doctrine, that is to say, permitting the employment of force for the collection of contractual obligations, but only after a debtor-State has refused to conform to the decision of arbitrators. The general acceptance of this principle would obviously lessen to a considerable extent the recourse to warfare as a method of compelling the payment of an unadjudicated claim asserted by a strong State against a weak one. Had such a principle been

a part of the Law of Nations two decades ago, Egypt could not have been seized and its revenues sequestrated for the benefit of European creditors until the exact amount of the sums advanced should have been ascertained by an international and disinterested board of arbitration. Neither would Great Britain, Germany and Italy have been permitted, in 1902, to bombard Venezuelan seaports and confiscate a third of the customs revenue of La Guayra and Puerto Cabello, except for the specific purpose of satisfying claims pronounced valid by an impartial tribunal. It is also obvious that the peace of the world would be materially promoted, if Mr. Choate should succeed in obtaining unanimous assent to the establishment of a permanent and distinguished court of arbitration at The Hague, to which no Power could refuse to submit a controversy (not involving its vital interest or its honor) lest it should seem to defy enlightened and humane public opinion. According to the latest telegrams, Mr. Choate's prospect of attaining his end is decisively brighter than it looked a fortnight, or even a week, ago.

The notion, apparently held by President Roosevelt and his Attorney-General, that the amazing drop in the prices of the standard securities quoted on the New York Stock Exchange, which has recently occurred, could take place without producing any effect on the industrial situation, or on the prestige of the existing Administration, will not bear close examination. Let us mark, for example, the inevitable influence of such a phenomenal decline in the value of securities on American railways, considered as consumers of iron and steel. It should be patent that, at the current quotations for stocks and bonds held normally in the highest repute, no railway would deem it expedient to issue new securities, or borrow on notes large sums of money for the purpose of extending its trackage or replenishing its rolling stock. It would wait for better times, or, in other words, for a season when its promises to pay, embodied in new issues of bonds or stocks, would regain the confidence of investors. The demand of railways for iron and steel products being thus reduced to a minimum, the output of the iron and steel producers would necessarily be contracted. What is true of this industry is true of every kind of manufacture. Even to agriculture the restriction would be communicated in the end, because the means of transportation, which even last year proved inadequate, would

this year be even more deplorably unequal to the demand of cultivators. So intricate, indeed, and inextricable, are the relations of the applications of capital and labor to the state of the money-market, whereof a stock exchange is the barometer, that it is impossible for a grave unsettlement of values not to cause, if prolonged, a more or less serious approach to a paralysis of a nation's industries. When such a paralysis occurs, and, with a fair show of justice or probability, can be traced to Federal interference with the normally automatic functions of finance and business—as it could be traced in 1837, and again in 1893—it is impossible that the credit and prestige of the Administration, really or ostensibly responsible for the disturbance, should not be sensibly impaired. There is reason to believe that, had Andrew Jackson, the real author of the crisis of 1837, been nominated, instead of Van Buren, for the Presidency in 1840, he would have been beaten, though, perhaps, not so disastrously as was his lieutenant in the Hard Cider campaign. It will also be recalled that Grover Cleveland, who swept the country in 1892, could scarcely find a single delegate to do him reverence in the Democratic National Convention four years later. In the light of these precedents, we seem justified in predicting that, if a financial and industrial convulsion should occur between the present hour and November, 1908, not only Mr. Roosevelt, but Rooseveltism, would meet with a popular rebuke so peremptory and decisive that recovery would be impossible. In the eyes, therefore, of the President's critics, it is rapidly becoming a question of deep moment whether Rooseveltism will be found out in time.

For some years after 1898, when the sympathetic attitude of the British Government during our war with Spain presented a refreshing contrast to the ill-disguised unfriendliness of most of the Continental Powers, we strove to forget, and may almost be said to have succeeded in forgetting, the distrust of British motives and feelings planted in us by disclosure of them in the War of our Revolution, the War of 1812 and the War between the States. Americans on both sides of the Atlantic proceeded to celebrate with gushing fervor what they somewhat prematurely assumed to be an indissoluble union of hearts and indestructible reconsolidation of the English-speaking world. From this dream of recemented fraternity, never again to be

ruptured, we were awakened somewhat rudely by the Anglo-Japanese treaty, concluded on August 15th, 1905, wherein our British brethren seemed utterly to have overlooked the possible occurrence of a war between Japan and the United States in the Pacific. We say overlooked, because the British negotiators of that compact did not exclude the United States from the list of Powers against which they agreed to guarantee the territorial integrity of the Mikado's dominions. That is to say, while our Republic is by that treaty left to defend for itself the Philippines and Hawaii against Japanese aggression, we should be debarred by the British navy from retaliating in kind, should we happen to beat our enemy at sea, upon the Japanese archipelago. We could not but compare this curious lack of foresight or precaution on Britain's part, where our interests were concerned, with the unwavering court paid to us by the Berlin Government, and with the significant fact that, although France and Russia have followed England's example in interchanging guarantees with Japan, the German Empire has held itself aloof, and thus kept itself at liberty to offer us cooperation, should our interests in the Pacific be assailed by a Power astutely safeguarded against reprisal. The more that long-headed Americans reflect upon the possible consequences of Britain's close association with Japan, on the one hand, and of Germany's studious avoidance of any such intimate relation on the other, the more they feel constrained to ask themselves whether they were justified, three years ago, in treating Britain with absolute confidence, and the German Empire with coldness and indifference. It is perfectly certain that, unless the British people, which is improbable, should compel its Government to repudiate on our behalf the treaty of August 15th, 1905, with Japan, we might find ourselves, in an easily conceivable contingency, without a friend in the Pacific, except the German nation, and hampered in an effort adequately to punish Japan for a sudden seizure of an American dependency, because Great Britain would bar the way. Americans, in a word, can hardly be blamed if they have been driven by events to the conclusion that a European Power which really wishes to be looked upon as our best friend ought, before assuming the obligations of a treaty with one of our possible enemies, to consider with exceeding wariness its bearing on our national interests.